

ARCHBISHOP ALEXANDER BURNET: 1614-1684

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IN the parish of Manor, not far from the river Tweed, stands an old tower which for centuries was the home of the Burnets of Barns. It is not known when they came into Tweeddale, but they held lands at Burnetland near Broughton as well as at Barns from some time in the fourteenth century. It is possible that the signatures "Burnetvilla" and "Burneville" found on documents back to the twelfth century, belong to the same family. Attempts to trace a connection with the Norman train of William the Conqueror have not been successful. But in any case the Burnets were a very old family, and for centuries they played an important part in the life of Tweeddale and indeed further afield.

John Buchan has made one John Burnet of Barns famous, and if some of his hero's exploits are not historical, the writer has certainly caught the spirit both of the time and of the locality. An earlier and historical John Burnet died about 1502, and was succeeded by his son William, whose son, another William, followed in 1545. A third William succeeded in 1575, and he was the most famous of them all, being known as the Hoolet o' Barns, on account of the night forays which he led probably on both sides of the Border. He is reputed to have been of great stature and strength, and to have lived to the age of 107. This William had a family of nine, seven sons and two daughters. The third son was Alexander, Advocate and Treasurer Clerk of Scotland. Another son was also an advocate and two more were Writers to the Signet. The second son was James. He graduated in the University of Edinburgh in July, 1609, was admitted minister of Lauder on 17th September, 1615, was presented to Jedburgh by Charles I on 15th September, 1635, and was deposed in April, 1639, on account of his episcopal sympathies. James married Christian, daughter of George Dundas of that Ilk, and they had two sons, the elder, Robert, a physician in Edinburgh, the younger, Alexander, the subject of our study.

It may be added here that many of the Burnets married into the families of other landowners and were closely connected with members of several aristocratic houses. The Archbishop's cousin William was a Writer to the Signet and succeeded his uncle by appointment of Charles I

in the office of Treasurer Clerk, Controller, Collector and Treasurer of the temporalities of churchlands annexed to the Crown. This William was suspect of malignancy, but on 26th March, 1647, on payment of 500 merks, the Committee of Processes "did exoner him of onie thing can be laid to his charge for his compliance with the rebellis." However, later on he lost his offices and was subjected to various fines and forfeitures for his adherence to the king. In 1661 he was restored by Charles II. It may be mentioned that the Burnets of Barns were all accused of malignancy in 1647-9, and had to do penance before the Presbytery of Peebles and in the Parish Church of Manor—a penance which no doubt was for them mere formality. Again in the time of the rebellions of the eighteenth century the Burnets, while they took little active share in the struggles, seem to have sympathised with the Stuarts. And the last James Burnet of Barns, who was forced to sell the estate in 1838, was one of the strongest supporters of the movement which succeeded in establishing an Episcopal Chapel in Peebles in 1827.

This introduction indicates the family tradition into which Alexander Burnet was born. It was definitely aristocratic; the family were always king's men, though not blindly so; and their persuasion in church affairs always leant to the side of episcopacy. All this is of importance, because only by taking these facts into consideration can we understand the position which he took up in later years and adhered to firmly throughout.

Let us then turn to the career of Alexander Burnet. Born in 1614 he was baptised in Edinburgh on 6th August, 1615, immediately before his father's presentation to Lauder. He graduated Master of Arts in the University of Edinburgh on 22nd June, 1633. Thereafter he became chaplain to the Earl of Traquair and tutor to the Earl's son, John Lord Linton. On 10th January, 1639, he was presented by Charles I to the Parish of Coldingham, but on account of the troubles of the times and especially his episcopal sympathies, was never settled. He went to England and was appointed to the living of Burmarsh in Kent, being instituted on 15th April, 1641, but in 1650 was ejected because of his adherence to the king's cause. He spent some time on the Continent, and seems to have acted as bearer of letters to and from Charles II. After the Restoration he was appointed chaplain to General Rutherford, a cousin of his father, later Lord Teviot, who was then Governor of Dunkirk. There too Burnet ministered to the English congregation, and is referred to as "Dean of the City of Dunkirk."¹ His first letter to Sheldon, written from Dunkirk, expressed his wish to build a church there suitable to the dignity of the English Communion. His brother Robert seems to have

¹ MS. in the National Library. Referred to in *D.N.B.*, vii, 392.

been acting as a physician in Dunkirk at the same time. In 1660 Alexander became Rector of Ivechurch. On 16th June, 1663, he preached before Parliament on II Chronicles xix, 6—"Take heed what ye do, for ye judge not for man but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgement,"¹ words still surely suitable for a similar occasion.

In 1663 Burnet was appointed Bishop of Aberdeen in succession to David Mitchell,² and was consecrated at St. Andrews on 18th September by Archbishop Sharp and others.³ After too short a stay in Aberdeen he was appointed Archbishop of Glasgow on 18th January, 1664,⁴ and was installed on 11th April. Gilbert Burnet says that these appointments were made on the recommendation of General Rutherford, whose chaplain he had been.⁵ On 26th April of the same year, he became a member of the Privy Council and an Extraordinary Lord of Session in November. These offices he held until 1669.

Little seems to be known of his administration of office in Aberdeen, and indeed his stay there, of only four months' duration, was too short to make much impression. It is likely that he did well enough in a district where episcopacy was more favoured than in other parts, and perhaps his life might have been happier and more influential if he had not been removed to Glasgow. It should have been realised in high quarters that one with the training and tradition of Alexander Burnet was not suited to the exceptionally difficult task of pacifying or controlling the West, with its strong covenanting spirit, or of bringing about some measure of agreement between the opposing factions neither of which was at all amenable to reason. And it must be admitted that Burnet was not very tactful in his dealings with his opponents.

Wodrow tells us that at his first diocesan meeting in Glasgow, Burnet "put five or six of his curates publicly in orders after the English pontifical,"⁶ which was no doubt a very heinous offence in the eyes of his presbyterian opponents. Moreover he set himself to tighten up affairs in his diocese. His predecessor, Fairfoul, seems to have turned a blind eye to the fact that some anti-episcopal ministers had remained in their charges after the Restoration, but Burnet insisted that such persons should either conform or leave their parishes, and where there was any difficulty he took strong measures. At the same time, the number of

¹ *Cal. State Papers*, Dom. Ser., 1663, 18th June.

² *R.S.S. Latin Reg.*, ii, 128.

³ *Life of Mr. Robert Blair*, Wodrow Soc. Ed. 1848, p. 452.

⁴ *R.M.S. Paper Reg.*, VI, No. 311.

⁵ *Hist. of His Own Times*, 2nd ed., enlarged, 1833, I, 377.

⁶ *Hist.*, 1835 ed., Glasgow, II, 8.

those deprived seems to be sometimes greatly exaggerated, as many as 400 being alleged to have suffered. But it has been pointed out¹ that the diocese of Glasgow had only 246 parishes and Galloway only 47, a total of 293, and in fact a majority seem to have conformed. Nevertheless, Burnet gained a reputation for cruelty and oppression, and Wodrow says again, "he was so grievous an oppressor of the city of Glasgow, that the greatest malignants, as the friends of the prelacy in Scotland were formerly called there, were obliged to protest against his encroachments upon the magistracy of that city."² Some of Burnet's contemporaries make similar charges. Thus, Sir Robert Moray, in a letter to Lauderdale,³ dated Edinburgh, 7th November, 1667, speaks of "letters of L. F. which excite to all severity." "L. F." stands for *Longifacies*, a nickname for Burnet, another being *Nez Long*, in the Lauderdale correspondence. Whether these terms suggest Burnet's physical appearance, a long narrow face and a long nose—no portrait seems to exist for confirmation or otherwise—or whether they indicate that Burnet was too much inclined to interfere in matters which Lauderdale regarded as his own business, may be difficult to say. But probably the latter is the more correct.

Efforts have however been made in some places to represent Burnet as comparatively lenient.⁴ Burnet himself, in a letter to Archbishop Sheldon written on 22nd November, 1667,⁵ claims that he never "opposed the granting of remissions to any persons that acknowledge their fault, but on the contrar laboured what we could to make them capable of pardon," and that "the Commissioner had blamed us for our too much leniency." But other letters from Burnet reveal another side. Thus writing to Sheldon from Edinburgh on 2nd December, 1665, he says, "We have had several meetings both in Commission and private Committees, in which we have urged and pressed the necessity of suppressing these disorderly and dangerous meetings which are so frequent in that Countrey (i.e., the west) and so likely to usher in a new rebellion."⁶ On 17th November, 1666, he wrote again to Sheldon saying that by God's mercy the rebels were dissipated, that some had been hanged and others were to come to trial. The tone of another letter dated 9th August, 1667, is rather despondent. He feels that not enough is being done to secure "the persons and goods of our ministers from violence and

¹ Cp. T. Stephen, *Hist. of Ch. in Scotland*, I, 574.

² *Op. cit.*, II, 8.

³ *The Lauderdale Papers*, Camden Society, 1884-5. (Referred to hereafter as *L.P.*), II, 83.

⁴ Cp. Keith, *Scottish Bishops*, 1824, p. 266. Also *Genealogical Account of the Family of Burnet*, 1880, P.P., from which personal details have been drawn.

⁵ *L.P.*, II, App. ix.

⁶ *Ibid.*, App. xxix.

robbery," and that if there is too much "lenity and remissness in pursuing and punishing these rebels . . . they will in a short tyme effectuate what they propose."¹

In this connection there is a story which must be referred to. It was alleged that in 1666 Burnet went up to see the King to urge yet stronger measures against the rebels, to "inflare" the king's mind against them. Gilbert Burnet² says that Alexander returned from London with a letter from the king to the President of the Council saying that he approved of all that the Council had done, but adding that he thought enough blood had been shed and ordering that such as should promise to obey the laws for the future should be set at liberty, and that the incorrigible should be sent to the plantations. Burnet, says the historian, let the execution of Hew McKail and others taken prisoner after the defeat on the Pentlands go on before he produced the letter, "so that blood was laid on him." This charge seems to be quite untrue. It seems unlikely that the king would give such a letter to one whom he knew to be, according to the historian, strongly opposed to its contents. But in any case the evidence is against Gilbert. He himself says, "It came to be known," and calls no witness. *Naphtali* and Nicol's *Diary* do not mention the story. Kirkton³ and Wodrow⁴ say that Sharp was the culprit. The same attitude is taken in the *Memoirs of William Veitch*,⁵ while the *Life of Mr. Robert Blair*⁶ says Sharp "deceitfully and cruelly concealed the king's letter." The story is indeed more like Sharp than Burnet, and we must accept the preponderance of the evidence which clears Burnet of the charge.

While there is little doubt that Burnet wished to take strong measures against those who he felt were a danger to the Church and to the King, he was under no illusion as to the motives of some who assisted in tracking down the rebels and imposing fines and forfeitures upon them, but who would not act as public assessors in the matter—he speaks of those who "may eat the kernell but will be unwilling to cracke the shell."⁷

On the other hand it must not be supposed that all went well between Burnet and the civil authorities. He was not popular with Lauderdale and his friends, as is suggested by the use of the nicknames mentioned above. What started the animosity we may never know, but it became more and more marked. For one thing, it seems that Lauderdale gradually became more anxious about the state of affairs in Scotland, which was going from bad to worse. The policy of severity was not proving successful; discontent was growing, and Lauderdale as an astute politician

¹ *Ibid.*, App. xlvi.

² *Op. cit.*, I, 435.

³ *Hist.*, p. 255.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, II, 37.

⁵ p. 35n.

⁶ p. 506.

⁷ *L.P.*, App. xlvii.

saw that something would have to be done to curb the avarice and brutality of the needy nobility who were, as Burnet put it, "eating the kernel." Besides, some of the nobility were plotting against himself.

So it came about that a more conciliatory attitude was decided upon. The king's letter of 15th July, 1669, declared that ministers who had been outed were to be reponed to their own charges if vacant or to other vacant churches, and that those not presently provided were to get 400 merks scots yearly out of vacant stipend. At the same time all conventicles were forbidden. This Indulgence however offended the bishops. They felt, justifiably, that ministers deposed by bishops should have no benefit of it, and that none but bishops in their synods could repon those whom they had deposed. Sharp even preached against this Indulgence before the Commissioner and the members of Parliament, though he practically apologised for the sermon afterwards.¹ The next step was the passing of the Act of Supremacy, which declared that the king was the supreme head of the Church. *The Life of Mr. Robert Blair*² says, "This abominable Act not only contains the grossest Erastianism and Popery, but makes that an inherent right of King Charles's Crown." To this Act Sharp consented, but Burnet opposed it, and his opposition brought about the serious breach between him and Lauderdale which led to his demission of office.

When the Synod of Glasgow met in September, 1669, a paper was drawn up, which came to be known as the Remonstrance of the Synod of Glasgow.³ The paper represents that "not only the substance and life, but the very forme of true godlyness doth dayly decay amongst the generality of the people." The Synod admits that many blame the representatives of the Church. But the true cause is to be found in the "clandestine (but now too avouched) conventicles." The laws against these have done little to restrain them. But the Synod resolve to mourn in secret for the evils of the day and in the Master's strength to do all they can to remedy the state of affairs. Secondly, they resent that "some have entered to preach publickly and avouchedly who were before censured with deposition by us." and have now been exempted from the jurisdiction which by law the Church should have over them, "so that being placed without the reach of our censures they value not anything that is our interest as a constituted Church." In spite of this and other consequent evils, the Synod merely make this testimony and hope that those who expect great things will not be disappointed. Further, the Synod regret that there has been so little done in prosecuting of the laws

¹ *The Life of Mr. Robert Blair*, p. 528.

² P. 529.

³ Printed in *L.P.*, II, App. xiv.

for building "an uniformity in the Church both for worship and discipline, whereby we might have had the splendour of a settled Church ; the want whereof has been in our opinion the bitter source of most our confusion." And that these humble resentments may come to the view of those who can give help, the Synod ask the Archbishop to make them known to the bishops, the Privy Council and any other who may contribute their counsel or authority. The paper was to be prepared by James Ramsay, Dean of Glasgow, and Arthur Ross, Parson of Glasgow.

The publication of this document caused a furore. It was regarded by some as an attempt to overturn the authority of Lauderdale. Certainly Lauderdale was furious and called it "the insolent impertinent Glasgow paper." The matter was reported to the king by Sir Robert Moray whose letter to Lauderdale¹ conveys to him the king's instructions. Moray himself thinks the Archbishop and his whole Synod, at least all who command in it, "ought to be deposed and Banished, if not worse." The king observed that "this damned paper shewes Bishops and Episcopall people are as bad on this chapter as the most arrant Presbyterian or Remonstrator." Lauderdale was to speak to the Archbishop, and he might burn the paper and record publicly if he thought fit. Gilbert Burnet² says that the king ordered that the Archbishop "should not be suffered to come to the Parliament and that he should be proceeded against as far as the law of the land could carry the matter." This is not in accordance with the facts as we shall see from the text of the king's letter.

This is what happened. The Privy Council took the matter up on 30th September, and Burnet was ordered to bring the paper to the Council on 14th October. James Ramsay and Arthur Ross were also ordered to compear. The Archbishop was himself on the sederunt of this meeting. On 14th October the paper was produced and remitted to a committee which reported on 16th October, condemning the paper as "of a dangerous nature and consequence." It was ordered to be suppressed and the proceedings were to be reported to the king. On 4th November Burnet's name was deleted from the sederunt of the Council. The king wrote to Lauderdale on 2nd December, approving of the action and opinion of the Council, and he went on, "Wee do require you to call him before you, & in presence of the Archb. of St. Andrew's & other such bishops as you think fit, to express our resentments of his misrepresentation of Our Council, & his accession to that paper of so dangerous a nature and consequence. And though both or either of them were sufficient to inferr a guilt of a higher nature than wee are willing to charge him with; yet

¹ *L.P.*, II, 137f.

² *Op. cit.*, I, 519.

wee shall be content to accept of a Demission & Resignation of his Bishoprick in our hands, & that no further prosecution be of the said matters (you alwise discharging him of his attendance at Our Privy Council): which if he be unwilling to do or postpone and delay, you shall in Our name forthwith commaund Our Advocat to intent a process against him before the Judge Competent for the crimes foresaid: And that dureing the dependance of the process, you, with the advice of the Bishops present, suspend him from the Exercise of the Episcopall Function, for all which these shall be your warrant."¹ That is not so severe as Gilbert Burnet's words would suggest. On 6th January, 1670, the Council was informed that the Archbishop had demitted his office and dignity, and his name was then removed from the Rolls of Council. Ramsay and Ross were examined, acknowledged their fault, and were reprimanded. So, says Wodrow,² Burnet "is made a sacrifice to the royal supremacy, and falls, for a while, a kind of joint confessor with suffering Presbyterians." Leighton was, much against his will, appointed to succeed Burnet and held the archbishopric *in commendam* for four years.

Burnet went into retirement in England, and Gilbert says³ he "retired to a private state of life and bore his disgrace better than he had done his honours." *The Life of Mr. Robert Blair*⁴ says that Leighton would accept only £300 a year, that Burnet received the same amount as a yearly retiring allowance, and that the balance of about £400 went to the Exchequer. Bishop Knox, in his life of Leighton,⁵ says that £300 went to Leighton and the balance to Burnet, but gives no authority for this last statement. The resignation document itself says nothing as to the financial arrangements.⁶

It is unfortunate that Burnet's stand against the royal supremacy was not more effective. Lauderdale became more aggressive than ever, and his own account of how he dealt with the bishops, and especially with Sharp, over Burnet's demission, is very revealing. In a letter to Sir Robert Moray dated 16th December, 1669, he tells how he called a meeting of the bishops. The Primate and the Bishops of Galloway, Aberdeen and Ross dined with him, and then he explained that Burnet had agreed to demit office, and asked them to draw up the terms of demission. "But I soon saw that they were not prepared, & the Primate told me faintly something like the indeliblenes of his caracter: My answer was short That I would not dispute that, But that I was sure the exercise of Archb. Bp. or minister in such a diocese or parish was not Jure Divino,

¹ *L.P.*, II, 167.

² *Op. cit.*, II, 144.

³ *Op. cit.*, I, 524.

⁴ *P.* 536.

⁵ *P.* 203 n, 2.

⁶ It is printed in *L.P.*, II, 175.

but depended solely on the supreme Magistrat. Let him be Archbishop in the Catholique church, I should not dispute it; But if he demitt, he must demitt all office & benefice as to Glasgow.”¹ That shows not only Lauderdale’s overbearing attitude, but also how completely the Church was forced to submit to the Crown in spite of protests from so many sides

Burnet’s administration of the archdiocese of Glasgow had been a failure, and indeed it is clear that he was not the man for the position. His faults were to some extent the faults of the age. If he is to be blamed for persecuting and harrying the unhappy Presbyterians, it is to be remembered that toleration was virtually unknown to both sides. The Presbyterians, when in power, were equally intolerant, and even when they were not in power, they did a good deal of harrying of the episcopal ministers, so much so that those in authority inclined to still greater severity. Indeed intolerance increased on both sides, and feelings on both sides were exacerbated, in a vicious circle. In Burnet’s favour at this period should be noted his thought for his clergy. Writing to Sheldon on 27th February, 1663/4,² he says, “ I have had of late some debates with my Lord Chancellour & others of the counsell about the vacant stipends, which were appointed by act of parl/ for the reliefe of the suffering clergie; and am able to make it appeare that of many thousand pounds taken wp wpon this account nothing is payed, nor (for anything I can see) intended, to the true sufferers.” And he adds that if he cannot get satisfaction, he will take the matter up again. Such an attitude of course would not endear him to the heritors of the parishes concerned.

Burnet remained in retirement for five years. On 17th December, 1674, Robert Leighton resigned his appointment in Glasgow, in which he had been unhappy. His gentle disposition and his plans for accommodation had been as unsuccessful as Burnet’s firm attitude, and he was much relieved when he was allowed to demit office. His letter of resignation expresses graphically his concern for what was happening in the Church, and he says, “ My best relief will be to spend the little remnant of my time in a private & retir’d life in some corner of England, for in the communion of that Church, by the help of God, I am resolv’d to live and die.”³ Before long Burnet returned to the see of Glasgow, to which he had been reappointed by the king’s letter of 16th September and Act of Privy Council dated 29th September, 1674.

This restoration has caused some controversy. Wodrow suggests that he was restored, “ as was then believed, by gross simony.” He tells a

¹ *L.P.*, II, 172.

² *L.P.*, II, ii.

³ *L.P.*, III, 76.

story, which he does not vouch for, and which he has apparently taken from Kirkton,¹ in the following terms: "The bishop's daughter (Anne) was married to the heir of Elphinston, and had a very large annuity secured upon the estate; her husband died very quickly from her; the gentleman who fell next to the lordship of Elphinston came in suit of my lord Haltoun's daughter. My lord knew very well how to bestow his children, and was unwilling to engage in an estate so considerably burdened with the bishop's daughter's jointure. At length this expedient is fallen on; the young lady is prevailed upon to give a discharge, and make a renunciation of her jointure upon Elphinston's estate, and my lord Haltoun found means to get the Archbishop her father restored to his office and benefice. This made some say, that the bishop's money, who gave his daughter an equivalent, was taken, and that of Simon Magus was not."² This story does not seem to have any other backing, and is indeed inconsistent with what Wodrow himself says elsewhere about Burnet's character.

The real reason for the restoration may be deduced from other considerations. Lauderdale, feeling himself better established again, was inclined to change from a conciliatory to a more oppressive policy, and had thus come nearer to Burnet's former position; and moreover there was the feeling that the state of affairs in the West required a firmer hand. Secondly, there is little doubt that the bishops, both Scottish and English, urged the claims of one who was a convinced episcopalian. *The Case of the Regal*³ says that the Archbishops of Canterbury and of St. Andrews and other bishops of England "interposed with their whole might; nor did they leave it, till they had the Archbishop of Glasgow restored." In the *True and Impartial Account of Archbishop Sharp*,⁴ it is said that it was through Sharp's efforts that Burnet was restored. Such causes seem much more acceptable than Wodrow's simony story.

Burnet then returned to Glasgow, and before long his correspondence shows his continued opposition to the first Indulgence as well as to any further indulgence, and his desire for firmness in dealing with the covenanters. He says that those indulged observe no limits prescribed by law, "the conventicling ministers being mor avowed in their separat meetings especially in our western corner, whereupon the people have not onlie shaken off all reverence to authoritie, bot almost all sence of religion, whiche threaten both church and state with a mor hastie and sad trouble than wee ar willinge to prognostick."⁵ This letter to Lauderdale is signed both by Burnet and by the Bishop of Lismore.

¹ *History*, 304.

² *Op. cit.*, II, 144.

³ P. 233. Ed. 1711. Cp. Collier, *Hist.*, II, 895.

⁴ P. 69.

⁵ *L.P.*, III, 80.

In 1677 the bishops made suggestions for the suppression of the conventicles, the memorandum being written by John Paterson, Bishop of Galloway. These proposals which were pretty severe dealt with the procedure which should be adopted by the Committee of Council empowered "to fine confine imprison or banish" the conventiclers. The actual instructions issued, the terms of which were not so extreme, are printed by Wodrow.¹ In the spring of 1678 Burnet proceeded to London to report to the king on the situation, and carried an address to him from the Synod of Glasgow. He saw the king on 25th April, and consultations went on for some time.² The following year he was back in London. Wodrow suggests that he went up to counteract proposals in favour of the presbyterians, but others³ think he was summoned. There seems however little doubt that his attendance at court was partly in connection with the plots against Lauderdale, whom Burnet now seems to have supported. There is no evidence that he approved the atrocities of the highland host, which Charles was forced to withdraw.⁴

As one result of the continued troubles Archbishop Sharp was assassinated, and Burnet succeeded him as Archbishop of St. Andrews and Primate on 13th August⁵ and was installed on 28th October, 1678. There is little direct information as to Burnet's work as Primate. He was certainly more regular in his attendance at the Privy Council, where he carried out the usual functions of a Primate—presiding at the Council, intimating fasts, determining questions of patronage, administering the Test, superintending the election of magistrates, signing Acts of Council, and so on.⁶

Burnet was one of the signatories of a letter dated 12th December, 1679, sent to Lauderdale, complimenting him on his past services to the Church, and seeking his further help in two particular matters;⁷ and also of another which takes the opportunity of Lauderdale's demission of office as Secretary of State for Scotland, congratulating him and asking him to preserve his wonted kindness, care and zeal for the writers and their cause.⁸

Other letters more strictly on ecclesiastical business were sent by Burnet in the name of the Privy Council to the magistrates of Aberdeen. The clergy of Aberdeen who had refused the Test were to have their charges declared vacant, and the magistrates as patrons were to present

¹ *Op. cit.*, II, 383.

² *L.P.*, III, 120ff.

³ E.g., T. Stephen. *Hist.*, III, 186.

⁴ *L.P.*, III, 112f.

⁵ *R.M.S. Reg.*, X, 125.

⁶ See *Records of P.C.*, 1681-2, Third Series, Vol. VII, Index. Also Vol. VIII, Index. s.v. Burnet.

⁷ *L.P.*, III, 262.

⁸ *L.P.*, III, 211f.

fit and qualified persons within three weeks for the vacancies. A further Order of Council to fill up twenty churches then vacant was issued by him for the Council, calling on the magistrates to present fit persons within twenty days. Many ministers in the City and County of Aberdeen were reponed by Order of Council of 23rd February, 1682.

Alexander Burnet died in St. Andrews on 22nd August, 1684, according to Fountainhall.¹ He was buried on 2nd September in the Church of St. Salvador near the tomb of Bishop Kennedy, but there is now no trace of this interment. His whole net estate amounted to £41,470, and in the inventory appear these items—two coaches, value £300; silver plate, £923; books, £1,050, all scots money. In his will he left legacies to his nephew, Robert Burnet, and to Joan Fleming, widow of James Smith, minister of Eddleston, probably his sister-in-law. He also left a mortification for the poor of St. Andrews in the form of a piece of land, for long known as the Bishop's Rigg, or Bishop Burnet's Acre, the income of which, amounting to some £5 10s., now seems to go to the general revenue of the burgh.

Burnet married Elizabeth Fleming, a daughter of George Fleming of Kilconquhar in Fife. A son predeceased him, and there were two daughters. Anne, of whom we have heard, married on 10th September, 1667, Alexander, 7th Lord Elphinstone, who died in 1669. On 20th August, 1674, she married Patrick, 3rd Lord Elibank. The other daughter, Margaret, married on 28th April, 1674, Roderick Mackenzie of Prestonhall, second son of Sir John Mackenzie of Tarbet and brother of George Earl of Cromartie. In 1668, Burnet inherited half of the estate of Woodhouse in Manor, the rental of which in 1649 was stated to be £164 18s. On his death this went to the two daughters, Anne and Margaret. The share of the former was inherited by her son, Alexander Lord Elibank, and Margaret's share by her son, Alexander Mackenzie Younger of Prestonhall. Both shares were later sold to Sir James Naesmyth of Posso in Manor.

Burnet does not seem to have been much of a writer. There is record of his preaching before Parliament in 1663, and also at the funeral of the Earl of Glencairn in 1664. He also preached at the memorial service for the Marquis of Montrose in the Chapel of Aberruthven on 23rd April, 1669. This sermon was published in Glasgow in 1673,² together with the funeral sermon preached for the Marchioness of Montrose on 23rd January, 1673, by Arthur Ross, parson of Glasgow, who had been reprimanded after the Synod's Remonstrance and who later became Archbishop of Glasgow.

¹ *Hist. Observes*, p. 136. *Hist. Notices*, II, 552. Both in Bannatyne Club eds.

² *Aldis*, 1975. "Printed by Robert Sanders, Printer to the City, and University." The description is—4to, 171 by 140 mm. A-B⁴C², pp. 19-[1].

The sermon published, apparently the only one to survive, of which only one copy seems to be recorded, that in the National Library, had for text, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord" (Rev. 14, 13). The dedication is to James, Marquess of Montrose, grandson of the Great Montrose. In this Burnet speaks of "this age which looks upon me with more prejudice than impartial Posterity will (I hope) think I have deserved." The sermon itself is found on pp. 5-19. Burnet begins by saying that dead bodies ought to be decently interred; to this pagans, Jews, and Christians all agree. There are many instances from Scripture and some from the Fathers. His purpose is to raise a *monumentum aere perennius* to the late renowned Marquess. He speaks very highly of him, but not in anything like abject adulation, such as was common enough on such occasions. There are three heads in the sermon. First, there is the proposition, "Blessed are the dead." Second, there is an exegesis or exposition of this proposition, limiting and restricting the indefinite proposition and resolving us of what dead this is to be understood, in these words, "That die in the Lord." Thirdly, there is the confirmation of this proposition thus expounded, and it is confirmed two ways. First, by authority, both of a voice from heaven commanding S. John to write it, and of the Spirit of God confirming it with a vehement asseveration, "Amen, saith the Spirit." Secondly, by argument or reason, proving it from the parts whereof this blessedness is constituted and made up, or particulars wherein it consists: and they are two, a relaxation ("they rest from their labours"), and a receiving a recompense or reward from their works in the words, "and their works do follow them."

Many of Burnet's letters are printed in the *Lauderdale Papers*, edited by Oswald Airy, from which quotations have already been made. There is about them no particular literary merit—they are plain straightforward letters that express their meaning in clear simple terms.

We have already indicated something of the nature of Burnet's service to the Church. It is clear that, brought up as he was in the episcopal tradition, he made it his life's task to further that cause, and there is no doubt that he was sincerely of opinion that his methods were those best adapted to the end he sought. Wodrow says, "he was a mighty bigot for the English ceremonies and forms."¹ But these were the days of strong opinions, and one can respect a man who stands by what he regards as right, even if one disagrees with him. Along with strong opinions we often find an intolerant spirit, and that also was characteristic of the seventeenth century, and Burnet shared this too with his opponents. Gilbert Burnet, who was related to him, tends to speak of him in a depre-

¹ *Op. cit.*, II, 8.

cating fashion—he “ meddled too much in that which did not belong to him and which he did not understand,”¹ a reference to his dealing with civil affairs. That remark applies to Gilbert himself. But in these days church and state were so closely connected that it was not easy to keep them separate, and it is difficult for the historian to-day to distinguish the affairs of one from those of the other, and to say that a particular action or series of actions was undertaken from ecclesiastical motive rather than civil motive, or vice-versa.

We have said that Alexander and Gilbert were related. They belonged to two branches of the same family, Gilbert to the Burnets of Leys in Aberdeenshire, and Alexander to the Burnets of Barns. They do not seem to have got on well together, and this may have reflected the ill-feeling that seems to have existed between the families. Burnet of Barns and Burnet of Leys had originally the same motto, *Virescit vulnere virtus* ; and the former referred a case to the Lord Lyon, Sir David Lyndesay of the Mount, as a result of which the Burnets of Leys had to adopt another motto.² The quarrel came to a head in the dispute as to which was the chief branch of the family. Sir Robert Douglas decided in favour of the Burnets of Barns in 1769. It seems likely that this family quarrel which lasted so long may have prejudiced the mind of Gilbert against Alexander.

At the same time Gilbert acknowledges that Alexander had some good qualities. He writes, “ He was of himself a soft and good-natured man, tolerably learned, and of a blameless life ; but was a man of no genius ; and though he was inclined to peaceable and moderate counsels, yet he was much in the power of others, and took any impression that was given him very easily.”³ This last statement seems to be contradicted by the Archbishop’s firmness in the matter of the Act of Supremacy. But the estimate of his personal character seems to be justified. Wodrow says, “ To give every man his due, he was certainly one of the best morals among the present clergy.”⁴ And he says that in spite of the suspicions about the simony story. This makes more remarkable the statement of J. King Hewison,⁵ who alleges that Gilbert Burnet says of the Archbishop, “ He kept his mistresses very avowedly,” and gives as reference “ i, 371.” This reference has not been traced in any of the editions of Burnet’s *History* available for consultation. Had Gilbert written the words quoted, surely he could not also have said, as he did say, that Alexander was “ of a blameless life ” ; and had Wodrow known of such behaviour he would not have given him the character quoted above. It seems that

¹ *Op. cit.*, I, 524.

² Sir George Mackenzie, *Science of Heraldry*, ch. 32, p. 96.

³ *Op. cit.*, I, 377.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, II, 1.

⁵ *The Covenanters*, II, 207.

Hewison is in libellous error. Other writers of Burnet's own time speak highly of him. Kirkton makes no charge against his moral character; Fountainhall says, "he was a man of much moderation, especially since he was laid aside in 1669."¹ George Martine of Clermont, in the dedication of his book, *Reliquiae Divi Andreae, or the State of the Venerable and Primatial See of St. Andrews*, speaks of Burnet's "exemplary and inflexible virtues, piety and honour."²

In another interesting and somewhat rare volume, *Epigrammatum Libri Octo cum aliquot Psalmorum Paraphrasis Poeticis*, by Ninian Paterson, published in Edinburgh in 1678, two of the *Epigrammata*, numbers 55 and 57, are addressed to Alexander Burnet. The first is entitled, "Ad Alexandrum Burnatum Reverendissimum Illustrissimumque Archiepiscopum, Carmen Paramutheticon." It consists of eight lines couched in adulatory terms, and may be quoted here.

Fluctuet incerto Praesul levis insula motu,
Et fluat ex humeris invidiosa Chlamys.
Majori fatum sceptro praeludit, et aras
Destinat, huic oneri quis magis aptus Atlas?
Virtutum vel Praesul eris, patientia regno
Si potior, sola hac tu tibi par, similis
Summa tuae laudis nostriq: infamia saeculi,
Uno in te Christi praeside navis eget.

The other *Epigrammatum* congratulates Burnet on his restoration to the Archdiocese of Glasgow, and is headed, "In Illustrissimum Archiepiscopi Glascuensis Episcopatum denuo initum Panegyris." It consists of a short Praefatio and then a long panegyric.

Another set of verses referring to Burnet appears in the MSS. of Sir John James Graham of Fintry.³ It is too long to quote here, but a few lines may show their quality. The heading is "On the consecration of a Bishop," followed by the Latin line, "Spectatum admissi, risum teneatis amici." We quote the first and the last stanzas.

Sau you the comedie wes latlie acted,
Baall priest solemnlie consecrated,
Room for Caiaphas;
Five Lords accompanied the beast
And sold ther honer for a feast,
Esaues a statesman. . . .

¹ *Chron. Notes*, 42.

² St. Andrews, 1797 ed. The dedication is dated August 1683.

³ *Hist. MSS. Comm. Var. Coll.*, V, 270.

At last the anti-Christiane limbe
 Balks David's psalmes and sing a hymne,¹
 Scriptures fanaticall ;
 And adds the Popish consecration,
 In a fattfaced and strong collationn
 With a health upon Burnett,
 Ede, bibe et dorme.

In the MS. this is followed by "A Modest Reply," which begins thus,

Saw you the covenanting frye
 Make godliness a comedie,
 Room for Judas. . . .
 Your Phebus from the west did rise,
 A light that did put out men's eyes,
 Welcome confusione.

Such verses as these are of course the rather extreme opinions of partisan and opponent, and cannot greatly affect our general estimate of Burnet's character. Though it may be difficult to see Burnet clearly through the mists of controversy, there is little doubt that he had some good qualities of mind and heart suitable to the state to which he came. According to his lights he was firm and unswerving ; he did what he believed to be right, however intolerant he may at times seem ; while he loved both king and church, he was not blind to the dangers that the king's claims offered to the church ; and he was willing, as many of his opponents were, to suffer for his convictions. He has never attracted so much attention as his kinsman the historian, who played his part on a wider field. Nor has he been studied to the same extent as his compeer, Sharp of St. Andrews. But the impression he leaves is of a finer character and more stedfast adherence to principle. He received a tradition which he appreciated highly, and it was his constant endeavour to establish that tradition more firmly and to pass it on to future generations unsullied and unspoiled.

¹ A reference to the *Veni Creator*.